



Can you identify these Objects?

See the next page for answer.



November, 2011

## James Herbstritt to Speak

The November meeting of the Frances Dorrance Chapter of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology will be held on November the 29th at 7:00 PM at the Duryea Municipal Building. Members and the general public are invited to attend.

The speaker at this month's meeting will be James Herbstritt, Historic Preservation Specialist from the State Museum of Pennsylvania. Mr. Herbstritt's talk will be on the late woodlands period in the Susquehanna Valley. Earlier this month he presented this same talk at the 2011 Annual Workshops in Archaeology Program at the State Museum of Pennsylvania. This is a great opportunity for those who were unable to attend the workshop to hear one of its featured presentations.

Herbstritt is a graduate of Pennsylvania's California State College and a State archaeologist for over 30 years with an acknowledged expertise in native American pottery. He is also a long time member of this chapter and has been involved in numerous local excavations.

In addition to his lecture, Mr. Herbstritt has volunteered to examine and identify any native American pottery that the audience wishes to bring to the meeting. This will be a rare chance to have a genuine authority examine and classify what you have as well as give you insight into the people responsible for its manufacture.

### The Conrail Site Winds Down for the Winter

As the end of November approaches so does the end of excavation at the Conrail site. It has been one of the most challenging years weather wise that we have ever had. Wind, rain and flood have all presented us with difficulties, but we have accomplished a good deal this season. We've expanded on last year's prehistoric excavation, hosted Boy Scouts and local students, cleared area around the historic foundation for future work and uncovered an old and heavily utilized living floor.

Typically we are able to carry on until mid December. Only three or four weeks will remain for our Sunday excavations before the cold weather brings us to a stop. If you haven't visited the site this year, try dropping by to see what we are up to. The road is getting better since the cooler dryer weather has dried it up considerably. It's still not great for sports cars or low riders and you may need to run your vehicle through a car wash afterward, but it is beautiful along the river this time of year. Come on by and watch, dig or sift. Bring an adventurous friend and enjoy a quiet spot in the middle of our very busy valley.

Sometime after the holidays our time on Sundays will be spent labeling artifacts from this year's dig. If that is something you'd like to do, you would be more than welcome to participate. No prior experience required. For more details you can send an Email to us at [tedbaird@verizon.net](mailto:tedbaird@verizon.net)

## Did our Neanderthal Cousins Head North?

Was the last stronghold of Neanderthals near the Arctic Circle? In the northern Ural Mountains, archaeologists have discovered Mousterian stone tools and butchered mammoth bones, which are associated with Neanderthals in Europe (though modern humans in southwest Asia used similar technology). The artifacts are dated to 28,500 years ago, 8,000 years after Neanderthals are thought to have disappeared, suggesting that some mastered living in cold environments and held on long after modern humans had usurped the rest of their range. As to whether Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens interbred, a new computational model, based on DNA samples from modern humans in France and China, shows successful coupling happened at a rate of less than 2 percent. The research suggests that either inter-species sex was taboo, or that the hybrid offspring had trouble surviving, according to the findings in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. There may have been "extremely strong barriers to gene flow between the two species because of a very low fitness of human-Neanderthal hybrids, a very strong avoidance of interspecific mating, or a combination," say study researchers at the University of Geneva and the University of Berne in Switzerland.

### Answer to what is this object

#### Slate Pencil

White slate pencils made by John Cain and Co. of Rutland Vermont were advertised as early as 1844. They may have existed earlier, but from at least 1844 up until the early 20th century, pencils cut from solid pieces of soft slate or soapstone were used to write on a tablet of harder slate. Artificial slate pencils were also made of ground talc or soapstone mixed with ground potters clay. Slate pencils came as either plain sticks, wrapped in paper or encased in wood like a modern lead (actually graphite) pencil. They were about the same length as modern pencils. The pencils pictured are typical of ones commonly found at historic sites where children lived. Most are a little over an inch long and the ends are tapered to a slight point. If they were worn much shorter than those shown, they would be difficult to use. Some examples have been found which appear to have been carved or worn into crude ball and spindle shapes, proof that young scholars didn't always concentrate on their lessons as they should have.